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Introduction: The Foul Yoke of Effeminacy

Though it is now many years since the original controversy erupted with John Carey's assertion in a review of Stanley Fish's *How Milton Works* that "September 11 has changed *Samson Agonistes,*" the repercussions of this fractious public debate continue to inflect how the work is read at the present time.[1] In the wake of this polarizing conflict, interpretation of the poem as a complex whole has been upstaged by an urgent pressure to critically avow or disavow Samson's final action as either divinely inspired or pathological, with the tantalizingly over- determined massacre of the assembled Philistines in the temple of Dagon functioning for both sides as evidence for – or against – an authorial endorsement of the spectre of "terrorism" allegedly mobilized within Milton's closet drama. What are we to make of the "rousing motions" that lie at the core of this poem's central moment of decision? How might the possibilities of a "queer Milton" or, for that matter, a "queer Samson," reorient this seemingly intractable crux? It is my gambit that a consideration of the constitutive links between effeminacy and terror – links I shall trace both across the Miltonic corpus and within its titular character – might allow us to rethink recent critical traffic between *Samson Agonistes* and the security state by exposing a queer logic of near-resemblance through which Milton's text both solicits and frustrates typological expectation.

Samson Agonistes (1671) establishes a rhythmic emotional pattern in which hopeful visitors try to draw Samson out of his thing-like withdrawal, and are rewarded with either brutally reflexive rejection or violent threats. To (briefly) rehearse the dramatic sequence of events: His father Manoa proposes that a ransom be paid in order to liberate Samson from enslavement, tempting him with the possibility of a return home. His estranged wife Dalila seeks reconciliation, and tries to tempt him with the promise of "conjugal affection." The brute Harapha tries to tempt Samson into single combat to determine the relative supremacy of the god of Israel against a pagan challenger. Finally, his captors try to tempt Samson to display his strength and submission for the Philistine elite. This dialogic sequence of temptations refused cumulatively builds an affective tension between violence and compliance that leads to the work's notorious catastrophe. After a

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mysterious transformation in which "I begin to feel / Some rousing motions in me which dispose / To something extraordinary my thoughts," Samson permits himself to attend the enemy's "holy day" (1381-83).[2] His ironic performance of pseudo- submission culminates in an offstage act of horrific violence: Samson pulls down the pillars that support the theater-like structure in which the Philistine nobility are celebrating their triumph, in the process destroying the feast of Dagon and himself.

If these potentially compromising temptations loosely parallel the series of temptations rejected by Christ in the poetic drama's textual partner, *Paradise Regained*, the intended consequence of that typological pressure remains subject to a curiously restricted pair of options: typology or anti-typology, a binary that drives even Julia Lupton's show-stopping critical formulation that "Milton's Samson is finally not typological (a figure of Christ), or even typological in a terminally suspended way ("exil'd from light"), but *anti-typological*, arresting the recuperative moment of typology in the sheer violence of his act."[3] Faced with a choice between a Samson that resembles Christ and a Samson that deliberately fails to sustain such a resemblance, I want to risk a question that is deliberately impertinent to the prevailing debate: how might the queer textual experience of Samson's effeminacy complicate the problem of typological resemblance itself? Going further, how might the pursuit of this question open out both the conjunctive disjunction of Milton studies with queer studies, and the sticky relevance of *Samson Agonistes* to the security state it supposedly prefigures?

Samson's stony, stoic refusals, and the upsurge of superhuman athleticism that overwhelms them, have together consolidated his identity as the definitive avatar of masculine fortitude, the *idée reçu* of the strong, silent type. Milton has other ideas. Far from impregnable and self-evident, in *Samson Agonistes* Samson's manhood is marked first and foremost by a persistent anxiety about its capacity to betray itself and transform into a disastrously compromising effeminacy. Tracking this as a historical structure with critical effects upon the present, in this essay as a whole I shall move between "manhood" and "masculinity" as the gendered term against which Samson's "effeminacy" shows up as its threatening structural inversion. For my purposes, "manhood" should be understood not only in relation to boundaries of gender but also to boundaries of ethos, polis and species; in early modernity, the opposite of manhood is not (only) "womanhood" or "femininity" but also in-civility, brutality, animality, in- humanity.[4] The conceptual space of the "un-manly" thus constitutes a negative reserve in which class, ethnicity, species, and gender differences mutually figure each other, and reservoirs of meaning from any of these separate registers can flow into the space opened up within manhood by effeminacy.

Anxiety about the inward contamination of male gender by effeminate possibility constitutes a thread of queer fear that runs throughout Milton's poetry and his prose, taking different local forms each time, but sharing a family resemblance with its locus classicus, the angelic reproach in *Paradise Lost* directed at "Man's effeminate slackness" (11.632). Samson's self-hatred focuses its energy through an insistent proclamation of the "effeminacy" he supposedly

demonstrated in succumbing to Dalila's demands that he reveal the secret of his strength:

> At times when men seek most repose and rest,
> I yielded, and unlocked her all my heart,
> Who with a grain of manhood well resolved
> Might easily have shook off all her snares:
> But foul effeminacy held me yoked
> Her bond-slave. O indignity, O blot
> To honor and religion! Servile mind
> Rewarded well with servile punishment! (406-413)

Samson's scenario of "yielding" and "unlocking" in the night summons up the remorseful laments of despoiled maidens bewailing the loss of their virginity – but ironically what has been lost here (momentarily displaced? forever dissolved?) is not maidenhood, but "manhood." The reference to other men as a class marks Samson as somehow cut off from homosocial solidarity, defenseless against his own servile gullibility. "Holding" him against his will, effeminacy is made here into an agent whose foul embrace cannot be withstood.[5]

Here we must attend to a discrepancy in the signification of "effeminacy" itself within the period. The term could designate a male with "womanly" characteristics, its first meaning, but it could also signify a male with an inordinate weakness *for* women; as the OED notes in reference to usage in Caxton (1460) and Puttenham (1589), "the notion 'self-indulgent, voluptuous' seems sometimes to have received a special colouring from a pseudo-etymological rendering of the word as '*devoted to women*'. Unequivocal instances are rare."[6] If we keep this second definition in mind, then Samson's self-accusation may simply be directed at his gullibility, and his indulgence of his wife. Certainly the Biblical source in the book of Judges sounds this note, with its joke-like repetition of Dalila's demand for Samson's secret eventually producing the desired revelation in a disastrous display of credulity. Secondarily speaking, "effeminate" could simply be a synonym for "uxorious."

Yet the capacity of the meaning of effeminacy in the period to slide between its two distinct definitions also usefully marks an ambient difference between early modern understandings of gender and normative (if equally debatable) "modern" schemas of sexual orientation. In our own cultural moment, in which we are subject to the reified sexological categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality and are schooled by popular psychology to probe for the occulted undersides of how those locations manifest themselves in everyday life, an "effeminate" male potentially falls under suspicion of so-called "latent" or unacknowledged homosexuality in a manner compatible with the first meaning but necessarily incongruous with the second. By contrast, for early modern subjects the polarities of "masculine" and "feminine" stand in a more volatile relationship as, on the one hand, social positions structured by rigid and divinely ordered prescriptions about rule and obedience, and, on the other, developmental outcomes placed by classical physiology into an entangling proximity.

Effeminacy's second definition within early modernity draws its strength from a historically distinct morphological imaginary sourced, ultimately, in a classical inheritance. Samson's sense of effeminacy as an invasion from within recalls John J. Winkler's formulation of sex and gender in classical Mediterranean culture as one in which "'woman is not only the opposite of man; she is also a potentially threatening 'internal émigré' of masculine identity."[7] Such a possibility might be said to constitute the bad dream of the so-called "One Sex model" so widespread within New Historicist readings of Galenic physiology in the wake of Thomas Laqueur's seminal *Making Sex*. If women are only born women because of their stalled developmental progress within the womb en route to becoming men, might it not also be possible that "from within" a man might somehow lapse and slide backwards towards another gendered location? This is the inverse scenario to the hermaphroditic possibility that animates that touchstone of New Historicist thought on the swerves and curves of gender normativity, Steven Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, in which sufficient heat permits the extroversion of "Marie" le Marcis's female genitals into their final, normative male form as the male genitals of Marin le Marcis.[8] If the pseudo-revolt of transvestite theater described therein through Greenblatt's reading of Viola occurred under the protective shade of a normative masculine superiority, then, framed against this New Historicist critical rubric, the effeminate male is the early modern gender system's worst possible outcome. This is so not because he is a figure neither successfully masculine nor authentically feminine (granting that such secondary authenticity is in a peculiar sense impossible given the inherent insufficiency of the feminine position), but because, as a backslider, he is the only agent capable of betraying the forward course of masculine supremacy itself. Loitering with intent in a contaminating interstitial space between genders, the early modern effeminate man is a gender recusant.

Acutely afraid of his own effeminacy but also eager to self-consciously punish himself for it, Samson seems at pains to accuse himself of specifically the second kind of effeminacy – but he risks protesting too much in the process, and his accounts of that condition slide uncomfortably "forwards" (proleptically, historically) towards the first definition, with its connotations of a contaminating inward marker of feminine qualities and, specifically, with a feminine "weakness" in the face of sexual advances. In Samson's imagination, this state capaciously opens itself to suggestions of anal rape and military dramas of subjection, captivity, and male homoeroticism. The self-accusation of "effeminacy" recurs in Samson's thoughts on the uselessness of a merely occasional temperance in a manner which telegraphs his terror at occupying a permissive, receptive, passive position: "What boots it at one gate to make defense, / And at another to let in the foe / Effeminately vanquished?" (560-562). The "other gate" in this image is an unexpected entryway into one's self. In this military scenario (the image is one of attackers penetrating a town's line of defense) "to be conquered" and "to be effeminate" somehow lead to and verify each other. Effeminacy makes one a ripe and justified target for conquest, and having been conquered confirms and ratifies that effeminacy, securing a lasting shame for the vanquished by retroactively

projecting a prior condition felt to somehow merit domination as its confirming response.

What relationships might there be between this foundational terror about the masculine self's inbuilt feminine possibility and other forms of terror, in particular terror at – not to mention acts of terror against – the unseen multitude of racial, religious, and sexual others which crowd in at an uncertain distance around the blind Samson? What are the links between the public display of Samson as the shaved and humiliated prisoner of war and his own anxiety about the loss of manhood? To what extent does Dagon's formal hybridity incite or call forth an act of terror from Samson, and in what way might this response index a certain constitutive linkage or provoking resemblance between effeminate manhood and pagan assemblage?

In pursuit of some provisional answers to these questions, I intend to borrow some critical tools from recent queer studies, not without some anxiety of my own. I adapt the phrase "queer assemblage" and its partners "terrorist assemblage" and "terrorist look-alike" from Jasbir Puar's work on the mutually reinforcing homophobic and xenophobic logics (or, if you prefer, anxieties) in play within certain persistent acts of violence taking place under the shadow of the overarching and, yes, ongoing "war on Terror."[9] In the related figures of the terrorist look-alike and the suicide bomber Puar identifies two manifestations of a politically and racially volatile form of queerness, one that alternately embodies violence and triggers pre-emptive or compensatory acts of violence in response to the ambient anxieties of the new security state. The exploding bodies of a suicide bomber-and-their-bystanders constitute a "terrorist assemblage" that violently re-organizes human and machine, flesh and explosive, criminal agent and victim, body and urban space, leveling and mixing and reforming both individual bodies and social bodies through radical acts of transformation. In Puar's analysis, "Terrorist look-alikes" and "queer assemblages" denote less an identifiable sexual / racial / religious / cultural category than a vertiginous failure of social location and the opening up of a threateningly non-specific possibility that constitutes what is "queer" now about those bodies that do not allow an implied patriotic "us" to feel safe.

In the first case, the figure of the "terrorist look alike" (say, a turbaned man in an airport) induces a panicked proceduralism about the universality of security screening in response to a de facto profiling which anxiously overlays virtual terrorism onto racialized bodies and faces. By contrast, "queer assemblage" is broader in scope and application, but in a particularly forceful reading Puar's text considers the joining of bodies and turbans in Sikh masculinity as a combinatorial assemblage in a Deleuzian sense: the interface fashioned between fabric and flesh constitutes an essenceless concatenation of materials with expressive consistency across a range of examples distributed across geographic space and political history, making the resulting point of contact into a constant site of becoming and intensification.[10] This particular assemblage is queer twice over, insofar as its presentation troubles gendered norms and in the process snarls the matrices of gender identity and citizenship/national identity. As conceptual assemblages themselves, Puar's terms can seem highly unstable: are they

descriptions of bodies or descriptions of the ideologically framed ways in which bodies show up for (paranoid, hostile) spectators? Do they describe a political situation or a prevalent phobic response to a political situation?

Describing racist attacks on Sikh men in the wake of 9/11, Puar's analysis flags the symbolic importance of forcibly removing hair in a manner that inadvertently recalls the symbolic subjection of the captured, shaved and blinded Samson:

> It is not for nothing that in one hate crime incident after another, turbans are clawed at viciously, and hair is pulled, occasionally even cut off. The intimacy of such violence cannot be overstated. The attack functions as a double emasculation: the disrobing is an insult to the (usually) male representative (Sikh or Muslim) of the community, while the removal of the hair entails submission by and to normative patriotic masculinities.[11]

While in this particular context the subject of this violence is the (mis)recognized Sikh male wrongly accused and attacked for summoning up the anxiety of a nonspecific but endlessly imminent terrorist threat in their onlookers (finally, a wished for end to the threat level orange cloud of unknowing implication in which we live), in her work as a whole the term "queer assemblages" seems to designate a field of affect magnetized by the tension between two related but opposed positions and the bodies that occupy them: the "terrorist look-alike" body of the turbaned Sikh male, and the "terrorist assemblage" of the suicide bomber, a body that is comprised of organic and inorganic materials, a hybrid creation of machine/flesh set to violently reconfigure urban space. The difficulty of the term is that each body in and of itself constitutes a "queer assemblage," but each functions through the total field of quasi-legibility which their capacity to stand for each other generates (the fear generated by the civic circulation of the supposed "terrorist look-alike" might be the primary site through which the imagined body of the "suicide bomber" operates more effectively to claim social/psychic territory than in any particular site of explosion), and so in a sense *this differential field too constitutes a "queer assemblage*." Each term triggers their own queer effects, and each occupies a contested zone of signification within the ongoing war on terror – for the queer critic no less than for the subject of "normative patriotic masculinity."

As Jasbir Puar extends the term, queerness has more to do with a certain affective indeterminacy than it does to any available taxonomy of legible sexual practices. In resonant sympathy with both the work of Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, Madhavi Menon and others, for Puar queerness is not an identity one comfortably inhabits but a charge set off by what does not scan, what shows up as somehow other; her work accordingly seeks out queerness in "the unexpected, the unplanned irruptions, the lines of flight, the denaturalizing of expectation."[12] At this political moment, what could be less reassuring than the "Monster-Terrorist-Fag," Puar and Amit Rai's term of art for the absolutely inassimilable

figure of the "terrorist look-alike" caught in the glance of the security guard, the potentially queer body of the turbaned Sikh male whose turban (like and unlike a headscarf) is said to induce a layered pair of interpretive anxieties (potentially female? potentially terrorist?) for its onlookers. The queer assemblage of the "monster-terrorist-fag" is felt to anchor by contrast the normative patriotic masculinity of both straight society and, in a decisive turn for Puar's analysis, a privileged (white) body of gay and lesbian "proud Americans" who are by contrast eager to vouch for their fealty to neoliberal tolerance in opposition to a Muslim outside now reified as inherently un-and-anti-queer. This implicitly Islamophobic polarity of affiliation conscripts the "properly queer" liberal and racialized subjects – piously invoked in every LGBTQ rollcall – into service as supposed victims under threat from Arab, Sikh, Muslim and South Asian communities, in the process erasing the existence of queers from those groups and tacitly pinkwashing Western democracies.[13] This framing constitutes a second differential field: the "queer assemblage" of anxiety and reaction that separates the "homonationalist" community from its rejected "terrorist look-alikes."

"Queer assemblages" do not show up in a triumphalist claiming of individual voices or communities but in moments of rupture in the socially negotiated; the assemblage is not an assembly, the communal or ghetto-ized safe space for consumption staked as a freehold within heteronormativity. "Queer assemblage" designates a corporeal, sexual, technological, cultural and historical manifold and tries to keep in play the queer body's provisional status as an arrangement open to interpretation and subject to change: bodies extended in time (think of the passages a transgendered body has undergone as an arc of becoming), bodies marked by violence, bodies marked by choice. It refers to, but does not capture and contain, an account of the queer body as a hybrid body, a part-object, something supplemented, perhaps enhanced, modified, or altered, something un-natural, a somatic border area with all gates open.

Accordingly, in invoking "Dagon as queer assemblage," I am relying upon this elasticity in order to bring out more fully the somatic queerness of Dagon as a node in the terrified / fascinated imagination of John Milton, and of Samson within Milton's work. That is, Dagon's mixture into "one" body of elements both male and female, human and animal, monstrous sovereign deity and humiliated victim of torture, represents the entirely corporeal and somatic quintessence of sin-saturated embodiment, but it does so as an assemblage that is "in some sense machined-together": this "sea-idol" is both a poetic construction and yet also the flesh-iest form that flesh can take, occupying the farthest and lowest point from, say, the angelic trans-sexuality imagined in *Paradise Lost*.

In relocating Puar's terms and impressing them into service in a reading of seventeenth century religious drama, I am producing a necessarily wrenching and "forced" cutting and re- assemblage of elements from Milton scholarship and queer studies into an encounter that will no doubt seem rather suspect from certain locations on both sides of this divide. But I hope to justify such hostage-taking. When read in terms of the overdetermined significations within its scriptural origin(s), and in the cluster of anxieties about sexuality which show up within Milton's creative re-use of this pagan god, Dagon's bodily form shows up

as a "queer assemblage" sourced trans-historically from an anachronistic series of layered meanings, species and genders. But the same can be said for Dagon's nemesis. A shaved and humiliated political prisoner put on display by a foreign power in an attempt to further disenfranchise a subject people, an anxiously hyper-masculine hero prone to passionate displays of self-hatred for the taint of effeminacy, Samson shows up as both a "queer assemblage" to himself and a "terrorist look-alike" for contemporary criticism, insinuating himself into public space and then destroying it.[14] Alternately absolutely powerless and absolutely powerful, in its capacious overtaking of boundary conditions Samson's body reduplicates the formal hybridity of Dagon: a blind-yet- illuminated mind buried within a body that acquires and loses traits of both genders, a body that partakes of creaturely conditions at the border between the animal and the human, a body frozen in postures of living death and roused by inward motions of divine fury.

Milton Studies vs. Queer Studies: a "Clash of Civilizations"?

Faced with the claim that Milton's literary representations of Dagon and Samson "show up as" queer assemblages, one may well be tempted to ask "for whom?" Though perhaps this special issue will prove the contrary, at this point Milton studies and queer studies appear to have little to say to each other. That this is so emerges from a perhaps not accidental historical divide, and is compounded by the habits and tendencies peculiar to both camps. To state the obvious: the first waves of "queer theory" were consolidated around the reading of British and American nineteenth century literature and culture in dialogue with and informed by, however much they critiqued or expanded, Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Volume I*, and were marked by an oft- simplified and widely disseminated assertion supposedly found therein concerning the nineteenth century sexological origins of homosexual identity qua medically legible category of personhood.[15] The ensuing early modern critical responses and correctives, from Bruce R. Smith, Jonathan Goldberg, Mario DiGangi, Richard Rambuss, Madhavi Menon and others tended to concentrate upon the drama of Shakespeare and Marlowe, or the lyric poetry of Barnfield and Spenser, usefully bringing the nineteenth century homosexual into an uncannily disjunctive historical/critical relationship with the anticipatory but distinct figure of the early modern sodomite. Yet in all the fertile and ongoing work to read and theorize about same-sex desire in early modern culture, Milton seems, all too frequently, conspicuously absent from the discussion. Given the otherwise voluminous amount of work on sex and gender in Milton's writing, such a lacuna still needs explaining.[16] I would venture to suggest that this scholarly no-go area has everything to do with the tenor of Milton scholarship, in which a constitutive anxiety about "ruining the sacred truths" and a vexed awareness of the watchful paternal gaze of an authorial super-ego seems, still, to inhibit the scene of critical investigation when the subject is sexuality.

There are exceptions to this rule, notably Gregory Bredbeck's *Sodomy and Interpretation: From Marlowe to Milton* (1991) as well as articles by Jonathan Goldberg,

Bruce Boehrer, Claude Summers, Ross Leasure and Philip Rollinson (to name only a few). But it seems that each attempt to connect Milton's literary corpus to the concerns and methodologies of queer studies ritualistically reasserts its lonely and embattled status. While describing the suppression of the accusations of buggery of male servants against Mervin Touchet in the Castlehaven scandal (now widely regarded as essential to the background of Milton's "A Masque at Ludlow Castle, 1934" [Comus]), Ross Leasure notes that "such tactics were especially employed when dealing with Touchet's homosexual activities, and may coincide with the general reticence of Miltonists [. . .] to acknowledge anything "queer" in or about the Miltonian canon."[17] Leasure is not alone in feeling so alone.

The constructive scholarly work that has been done has been dominated by redemptive patterns of recovery, of the search for encrypted or lost homosexual meaning in an alternately despairing and affirmative historiographical mode that Heather Love has memorably identified as "emotional rescue."[18] In *Sodomy and Interpretation* Gregory Bredbeck makes the promising claim that Milton's work "suggests a space of meaning outside the heterocentrically prescriptive codes of ideal Renaissance genders,"[19] The most compelling example of this outer space beyond gender normativity occurs in *Paradise Lost*'s account of angelic sexuality, whose ambiguous suggestions of "a life of homosexual promiscuity" prompted dismissive foreclosure of these "filthy" and "foolish" notions from C. S. Lewis in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*. Yet, in a chapter forbiddingly titled "The Mistake About Milton's Angels," Lewis evades the specter of male homosexual angels by recourse to an even queerer formulation of a celestial hermaphroditic free- for-all:

> [. . .] there exists among these creatures, according to Milton, something that might be called trans-sexuality. The impulse of mutual love is expressed by the total interpenetration of two aereal bodies; 'total they mix' because they are ductile and homogenous- they mix like wine and water, or like two wines.[20]

Bredbeck notes that "while the fallen spirits can range freely throughout the system of sex and gender, unfallen spirits can range freely *outside of it*."[21] Yet, frustratingly, having noted this Bredbeck generally sticks to the script of simply discovering or uncovering traces of male homosexuality in the Miltonic text. In response to the willful resistance to homosexual signification prevalent within Milton criticism, Bredbeck seems more interested in the compensatory demonstration that homoerotic meaning was available to Milton within the period courtesy of classical pastoral, and that, in choosing not to assign sodomitical temptation but rather patriarchal temptation to Belial, Milton demonstrated on at least one occasion a willingness to refrain from deploying one available commonplace of anti-sodomy rhetoric. The affirmative cast of such critical quarry is a first step, but one whose lonesome echo calls for a following response which reconsiders the volatility of the a-gendered zones that both Milton's work and Lewis' text potentially make available to the queer critic.

Bredbeck's recovery of the lost non-heteronormative potential of Milton's angels is a tantalizing possibility upstaged by the central importance within his chapter that he grants to a momentary holiday from homophobic abuse in *Paradise Regained*; the real stakes of the project hinge upon the attempt to infer some kind of provisional glimmer of acceptance, or at least recognition of a specifically male homosexual possibility as slightly less than the worst thing that could happen, within the Miltonic corpus. This kind of stance towards the lost or encrypted homosexuality exemplifies what Foucault termed "the consoling play of recognitions" at the core of traditional historical practice in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."[22] Bredbeck's introductory scene of the queer theorist righting the homophobic wrongs of past scholarship remains mired in a self-serving rhetoric about gay male visibility that belies the conformist contours of its own structuring imperative as a scene in which the proliferation of "trans-sexual" meanings is replaced by the interpretive production of legibly homosexual, i.e. homo-normative, male subjects.[23]

I want to suggest that if queer readers are to engage Milton's writing otherwise, we should not only hunt for buried, encrypted, or subterranean representations of homosexuality and homoeroticism that are potentially positive or affirmative in character, but also attend more closely to the negative affects of anxiety, shame and hostility generated by moments of queer possibility within these texts, and try to think about how issues of form, monstrosity, racialization, and hybridity inflect the operation of textual "queerness." Instead of hopefully amplifying one solitary instance in which Milton pulls a punch and demurs from attacking sodomy with gusto, one might also want to discuss the far more frequent occasions on which he happily and enthusiastically does exactly that, and to listen more closely to the grain and character of that hostility. These moments of antagonism and hatred for sodomy and effeminacy seem intuitively more consistent with the overall tenor of Milton's religious commitments and rhetorical postures as I read and understand them, and owning up to them in the context of a queer reading might allow us to avoid the "Milton-one-of-us syndrome" that Marshall Grossman has identified as one of the stumbling blocks to appropriationist encounters with Milton that seek to reform or refashion Milton to better resemble contemporary ideals.[24] Such a reorientation seems necessary if we are to provide a productive account of how and where "queerness" surfaces within the Miltonic corpus.

Blind Sodomites and Hybrid Animals

Comprising curiously macho fifteen-year-old female virgins, curiously weepy shaven- headed strongmen, coy trans-sexual angels, thyrsus-wielding Virgilian shepherds, and Puritan propagandists prone to curiously theatrical displays of anti-theatrical ranting, Miltonic queerness is an affective/rhetorical manifold that swings both ways between praise and blame. But it tends towards blame. When it arises in the prose writing, queer meanings and significations produce a choppy

linguistic surface of strongly negative repudiation, virulent disgust and comic scorn. Milton's willingness to rhetorically tar his enemies with a sodomitical brush is an old habit born during his first officially sanctioned engagement for the Council of State as Secretary for Foreign Tongues of the interregnum government, *Eikonoklastes* (1649). In the preface to that text, those who praise and dote upon Charles I's defects, because they are his, are said to inhabit a state of "strucken blindness" which borders upon the comparable spiritual blindness of Sodomites:

> That they who from the first beginning or but now of late, by what unhappiness I know not, are so much affatuated not with his person only but with his palpable faults, and dote upon his deformities, may have none to blame but their own folly if they live and die in such a strucken blindness, as next to that of Sodom hath not happened to any sort of men more gross or more misleading.[25]

That sodomites are accused of spiritual blindness is a telling accusation coming from someone in the midst of a battle with literal, physical blindness, and tempts one to hear sadness and fear blending beneath the defensive, hectoring tone. This strategic disavowal of blindness ("it is not I who am blind but you") recurs, of course, in the *Second Defense* in the context of Milton's assault on the royalist's emotional attachment to the legacy of the martyred Charles, an attachment that he repeatedly characterizes as effeminate.[26]

Such shaming recurs throughout the *Second Defense of the English People*, as when he cattily refers to his continental opponent as "Salmasius (or Salmasia, for which of the two he was, the open domination of his wife, both in public and in private, had made it quite difficult to determine)."[27] Writing against Alexander More and Adriaan Vlacq, respectively the supposed author and the publisher of *The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven, against the English Parricides*, whose agitated attacks upon both Milton's person constituted the occasion for the *Second Defense*, Milton transfers the accusation from an *ad hominem* attack into a corresponding charge against their writing: "These peddlers of effeminate little verses – who would not despise them?"[28] While such rhetorical assaults are neither surprising given the pamphlet-war context nor particularly unique to Milton, I wish to argue that they are, for all this, more than a passing reflex of vituperation. If, in cocking one's ear to the tone with which the linked accusations of sodomy and effeminacy are thrown at Milton's enemies in the tracts and pamphlets, one hears curiously persistent notes of strangled, encrypted, and disavowed identification, some might object that this only indexes the perverse interpretive reflex engendered by a rote queer studies praxis all too eager to immediately flip expressions of disgust into expressions of covert desire. Such moves can of course seem awfully glib, a kind of queer-positive theoretical variant of the everyday acts of "wild psychoanalysis" committed beneath the shade of a popular psychology giggling to itself about omnipresent "latent homosexuality." Sometimes disgust is just disgust. And yet, Milton's willingness to publicly connect blindness with sodomy in the context of his pamphlet-war combat with his Royalist enemies is simply too fraught with

overdetermined layers of identification and disavowal to ignore, precisely because the trope of sodomitical blindness was invoked in the period as a figure for both physically reproductive "errant" desires and for textually (over)productive critical activity.

Admittedly, the counterintuitive assertion that "blind" acts of sodomy must be understood as *reproductive* in a manner that models certain kinds of textual productivity will require some historical explanation and fleshing out. The accusation in *Eikonoklastes* that the men of Sodom suffered from some kind of spiritual "blindness" was indeed a commonplace; what is compelling for my argument is that this specific connection between blindness and sodomy was figured in the prose of the period not (only) in conjunction with homosexuality but with the production of monstrous and chimerical hybrids that were said to be the result of acts of sodomy committed upon animals. Consider the following extended discussion of "a cow that gave birth to a half- man" in Ambroise Paré's teratological tract *On Monsters and Marvels:*

> Now I shall refrain from writing here about several other monsters engendered from such grist, together with their portraits, which are so hideous and abominable, not only to see but also to hear tell of, that, due to their great loathsomeness I have neither wanted to relate them nor have them portrayed. For (as Boistau says, after having related several sacred and profane stories, which are all filled with grievious punishment for lechers) what can atheists and sodomists expect, who (as I said above) couple against God and Nature with brute animals? *On this subject, Saint Augustine says the punishment of lechers is to fall into blindness and to become insane, after they have forsaken God, and not to see their blindness, being unable to follow good counsel.*[29]

Far from being condemned to an unproductive and anality-inflected sterility, the spiritually "blind" sodomite is instead figured as all-too-fertile, creating a hybrid offspring whose unspeakable / unrepresentable loathsomeness in fact energizes and makes possible the very text that struggles to reject it. Unfazed by Paré's strong expressions of personal disgust and stated unwillingness to have such monsters portrayed, the editors of the text accompanied his description of such monstrous births with a suitably bizarre sequence of woodcuts depicting the products of such unions: "Figure of a child, part dog," "Figure of a monster with the face of a man and the body of a goat," "A monster, half-man, half-swine," "Figure of a monster like a dog with the head like a bird," etc.[30] It is here that the *queerness of early modern sodomy* – rather than and indeed, instead of, the homosexuality of early modern sodomy – emerges most forcefully: sodomitical sexuality was imagined in the period as a potentially reproductive sexuality, and its hybrid generativity cannot be thought outside of a subtending racial imaginary which regarded the possibility of such mixtures with fear and fascination.

Similarly, while descanting upon the specific quality of his opponent's sodomitical and effeminate deformity, Milton decries their *literary* production as a monstrous hybrid in a manner that reminds one of Paré's medical catalogues of hybrid monsters. Consider this mockery of More and Vlaacq in the *Second Defense* in terms of Paré's beast-fable of sodomitical creation:

> But listen! Another Cry, something strange and hissing. I take it that geese are flying in from somewhere or other. Now I realize what it is. I remember that this is the Tragedy of a Cry. The Chorus appears. Behold two poetasters – either two or a single one, twofold in appearance and of two colors. Should I call it a sphinx, or that monster which Horace described in the *Ars Poetica*, with the head of a woman, the neck of an ass, clad in varied plumage, with limbs assembled from every source? Yes, this is that very monster.[31]

Far from a stereotypical overspill of a liquid femininity into the solid terrain of masculine psychic life, the monstrous sodomitical construction of royalist writing requires a new morphological imaginary that solders together component parts sourced across gender *and* species barriers and stapled together seemingly by chance.[32] The mongrel nature of these creations mirrors the mongrel nature of their creators, and the royalist authors are themselves understood as aggregates of components: in a paratactic and inclusive jumbling of linked but separate pejorative senses that calls to mind Polonius' "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral," Milton's opponents are censured for presenting the public with the blind-sodomitical-hybrid- effeminate-theatrical.

In evoking the monstrosity of a creature "with limbs assembled from every source" taken out of Horace, Milton here refers to the lines which begin the famous "Letter to Piso," which I provide here in Ben Jonson's translation as "Horace, of the Art of Poetry":

> If to a woman's head a painter would
> Set a horse-neck, and diverse feathers fold
> On every limb, ta'en from a severall creature,
> Presenting upwards a fair female feature.
> Which in some swarthy fish uncomely ends:
> Admitted to the sight, although his friends,
> Could you contain your laughter?[33]

In contrast with this painted image, great poetry ought to "Be simple, quite throughout, and wholly one." By yoking together human and animal elements and miscegenating the "fair" and the "swarthy" into an uncomely new (anti)form, the painter's work fails to achieve synthesis and verisimilitude, stalling instead at the level of collage with a one-man *cadavre exquis*. Yet the very priority of this assemblage, coming as it does at the head of an extended discussion of

compositional strategy, lends a curious kind of exemplarity and mystique to this icon of the ridiculous; indeed the incident itself feels appended like an extraneous head onto the rambling text that follows it, tainting the compositional lecture itself with an associative formal resemblance to the chimerical anecdote that begins it. Furthermore, one might want to attend to the private unveiling of this image as a gendered scene, in which the homosocial sodality of male artist and his friends gather together to regard a painted image of a female body gone awry. The inability to correctly fashion an imaginary woman marks the painter with a double lack: a lapse in artistic skill that may also signal a failure of sexual maturity and savoir-faire. One has failed as a man and as a painter if one does not know how to "make" a woman. Further complicating this humorous scene, racial anxiety compounds and reinforces gender monstrosity. The mixture of the human and the inhuman and the mixture of the "fair" and the "swarthy" presents human- animal hybrids and racially mixed hybrids as if it were already intuitively obvious that they figure each other, thus reifying the subordinate inhumanity of "swarthy" races as a naturalized reflection of the species barrier among animals while replacing the frightening possibility of the biological viability of interracial mixtures with a comically "impossible" gallimaufry of scraps.

One way to measure the distance between Horatian poetics and their early modern recurrence is precisely in the shifting position of such assemblages along the spectrum between praise and blame. Far from functioning transparently as a self-evident example of the failure of the poet to observe the laws of representational decorum, by the sixteenth century the construction of such chimerical assemblages came to be daringly identified with the very essence of the poetic act, now redefined as a prosthetic extension of the natural into "a new nature." The phrase comes from Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* (1595), in which the quasi-magical capacity of the poet to re-form nature is invoked in reference to the deliberate construction of the unnatural: "Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like."[34] If this repertoire of new creations is resolutely classical, the assertion of the dignity of artificiality sounds a distinctly un-Horatian note, but also admits directly the possibility of the chimerical assemblage as a desired object, as something not only monstrous but also intoxicating, fascinating.

Such a possibility is consciously kept under wraps in Milton's prose. For Milton, at least in the heated moment of rhetorical battle, the compositional failure involved in fashioning such a "very monster" reflects back upon the failed genders of their creators in a manner calculated to revive the censorious critical laughter that Horace also sought to inspire. The effeminacy of More and Vlaacq, their status as men somehow mixed with and compromised by a contemptible surplus of femininity, is mirrored in the formal admixtures of their literary creations: they, like their writing, are hybrids, chimerical assemblages, equally comical and repellent. But the Horatian background to Milton's passing swipe also signals a more important connection between the gendered rhetoric of his prose and the

imaginative substratum of his poetry. The Horatian monstrosity is not only part female, but *part fish*, and this specific woman/fish assemblage recurs in a telling (and also partially submerged) manner in Milton's representation of Dagon, the Philistine deity whose festival triggers Samson's cataclysmic outburst of divine violence in *Samson Agonistes*.

Dagon as Queer Assemblage

Reappearing at every stage of his poetic development, the image of Dagon's violated, inhuman form seems to enjoy the status of an idée fixe in Milton's literary imagination. Dagon initially appears in "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," in Milton's first catalog of pagan divinities bewailing the birth of the Savior, as an epithet of abuse rather than a proper name: "Peor and Baalim, / Forsake their temples dim, / With that twice-battered god of Palestine." (lines 197-199) When Dagon returns in the catalog of pagan gods and "gay religions of pomp and gold" in Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's describes in detail this "twice battered" Palestinian body's progress from hybrid formation to humbling mutilation:

> Next came one
> Who mourned in earnest, when the captive ark
> Maimed his brute image, head and hands lopped off
> In his own temple, on the grunsel edge,
> Where he fell flat, and shamed his worshippers:
> Dagon his name, sea monster, upward man
> And downward fish: yet had his temple high
> Reared in Azotus, dreaded through the coast
> Of Palestine, in Gath and Ascalon
> And Accaron and Gaza's frontier bounds. (457-466)

The recent Kerrigan, Rumrich and Fallon edition points out that "'Dag' is Hebrew for fish" but does not further clarify that Dagon's fishy provenance is the result of a false etymological slippage between the original Ugaritic root word for grain ("dgn") and its Hebrew near- homonym.[35] For our purposes this misprision need not detain us, as Milton's understanding of Dagon is derived entirely from the Hebrew text of 1. Samuel 5.1-7, which describes the Philistine captivity of the ark and the humiliating outcome of a combat between the Ark of the Covenant and the idol of Dagon. In the *Geneva Bible* (1560) the passage reads as follows:

> Then the Philistims toke the Arke of God and caryed it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod, Evn the Philistims toke the Arke of God, and broght it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And they of Ashdod rose the next day in the morning, beholde, Dagon was fallen upon his face on the

> ground before the Arke of the Lord, and they toke up Dagon, and set him in his place againe. Also they rose up early in the morning the next day, & beholde, Dagon was falle upon his face on the grounde before the Arke of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and the two palmes of his hands were cut off upon the thresholde: onely the stumpe of Dagon was left to him. (I. Samuel 5.1-4)

Period Biblical scholarship rendered the latent "meaning" in Dagon's name explicit in marginal commentary on this passage; the Geneva Bible glosses this tale with a note that Dagon "was their chiefe idole, & as some write, from ye [. . .] downward like a fishe, and upwarde like a man." (I. Samuel.5.2), a description directly echoed, but poetically corrected, in Milton's epic, which tumbles across the linebreak to formally enact the split in his morphology: "Dagon his name, sea monster, upward man / And downward fish." (462-463)[36] But Milton's sequential descent from higher humanity to lower animality also, of course, summons in the mind of the reader the half- conscious internal expectation of a term more frequently held in opposition to the dominant term of "man," namely, woman. From the waist up Dagon may be all man, but the fishy nether regions swim with alternate morphological possibilities.

I do not mean to suggest that Dagon is "really" female in any clear sense; indeed, to do so would be to shut down the liquidity of Dagon's oceanic associations and to misrepresent the manifold nature of how Milton understands divine form. In its capacity to slip free of the intransigent weight of the merely sexed human, Dagon's underlayer of hermaphroditic meanings partakes of the material ambiguity attendant upon not only embryonic potential humans but all spirits, both angelic and demonic:

> For spirits when they please
> Can either sex assume, or both; so soft
> And uncompounded is their essence pure,
> Nor tied or manacled with joint or limb,
> Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
> Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose
> Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
> Can execute their airy purposes
> And works of love or enmity fulfill. (423-431)

Noting such choice and flexibility only takes us so far, however, and in the case of Dagon it ignores the brute fact of idolatry's fixation not on an airy spirit but on an object that can be mutilated or knocked down. The tale in Samuel of the prostration of Dagon's idol before the Ark, and of the subsequent decapitation of the idol resolutely materializes Dagon into a massive, thingly affront to the primacy of the god of Israel.

Dagon's abased and mutilated status in the text of Samuel (first forced to bow down to the Ark, then decapitated and symbolically "circumcised" by the

skinning of the palms of both hands) irrevocably marks this divine body as a key site through which to think about the anxiety generated by difference: the tribal conflict between the Philistines and the Israelites plays itself out in a violent script about the failure of idolatry that nonetheless resorts to its figurative logic. Dagon's subordination to the Ark is a battle between two idols, and the text's sadistic imperative to wound or insult the idol of Dagon at some level perpetuates the very thing the story is meant to disprove (idols are powerful, and the need to physically chasten Dagon's idol pays perverse complement to its totemic authority and representational fitness as a tribal protector). Marking and maiming the idol of the enemy expresses a rage to differentiate that encrypts an anxious sense of proximity; it is not safe to set Dagon and the Ark beside each other. If Dagon's body is marked in its appearance in *Paradise Lost* as irrevocably wounded by its encounter with the absolute sovereignty of the Ark, Dagon in *Samson Agonistes* telescopes backwards before this event from Samuel to Judges, and represents idolatry ascendant, a chiasmic popular embodiment of both the error of monstrosity and the monstrosity of error.

Forecasting and inverting this conflict, Manoa's shaming speech to his son constitutes a kind of traumatic alternative to the text of Samuel, a fearful scenario in which the God of Israel is brought low by Dagon ascendant:

> This day the Philistines a popular feast
> Here celebrate in Gaza, and proclaim
> Great pomp, and sacrifice, and praises loud
> To Dagon, as their god who hath delivered
> Thee Samson bound and blind into their hands,
> Them out of thine, who slew'st them many a slain.
> So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,
> Besides whom is no God, compared with idols,
> Disglorified, blasphemed, and had in scorn
> By th'idolatrous rout amidst their wine. (434-443)

We can now see why Samson's self-hatred and Samson's hatred of Dagon are mutually supportive: his effeminate subjection to Dalila has produced the God of Israel's idolatrous subjection to Dagon. The idol's hybridity as a man/fish (woman) assemblage shamefully signifies Samson's exogamous desires, embodying in a grotesquely literal manner the "mixture with the other" that has effeminately subjected the Nazarite hero to a foreign woman. Neither fish nor flesh, Dagon's mixed status recalls the shame brought down upon his head by Samson's own exogamous wanderings from his people in favor of sexual alliances with ethnically (racially?) distinct women, first with the nameless "woman of Timna" and then with Dalila. To put it baldly, so to speak, Samson's shame arises as a result of his sexual preference. His status as the deliverer and judge of his people has been compromised by his desire to stray from them into bed with Canaanites and Philistines.

Seen from different angles, Dagon represents both Samson and Dalila, and this mutual figuration furthers the play of resemblance within the text as

"manliness" encounters itself in its others. As a strange woman and her strange god, Dalila and Dagon are made to subtly stand in for each other in a revealing, if comic, moment in *Samson Agonistes* when the chorus describes the approach of an ambiguous figure to the blind hero: "But who is this, what thing of sea or land? / Female of sex it seems" (710-711) The chorus' confusion about this mysterious entity from either sea or land has been taken to be a mockery of Aristotelian disquisition and progressively finer distinctions, but it also seems richly resonant with Dagon's chimerical status as an idolatrous "thing" composed of elements from both "sea" and "land." Dalila's mysterious apparition to the chorus hovers between the borders policed by the anti-idolatrous injunction of Exodus 20.4. ("You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.") In elevating his romantic allegiance to Dalila above his duties as a Nazarite to Israel, Samson in effect has committed a kind of romantic/sexual idolatry in choosing her that the poetic drama works to repudiate and correct. If Dalila only "seems" to be of female sex, this certainly calls the chorus' own visual acuity into question, fingering them as "blind guides" to Samson who only just see better than the blind slave they counsel, but it also further amplifies the queerness of the Dalila/Dagon pair, suggesting that there is something misleading or astray about their very gender, something either in disguise or permanently in the process of becoming. In the wake of her final salvo to Samson, Dalila becomes an animal: "She's gone, a manifest serpent by her sting / Discovered in the end, till now concealed." (997-998) In this final act of "becoming animal" she shares a fate with Samson's posthumous choral description, which is, is Julia Lupton's fine phrase, "a veritable eruption of animalia."[37] Figuring him first as a Dragon, and then as an Eagle, Samson's aura of monstrous power and brute inhumanity are subjected to a final torque of gender and species re-assignment when the chorus compares his final resurgence of divine strength with the resurrection of the female Phoenix from her own "ashy womb" (1697-1705).

Samson as "Terrorist Look-Alike" and Dagon Look-Alike

Less than kin and more than kind, "anxiety" and "terror" occupy a usefully disjunctive proximity to each other in critical work on affect, and since I have slid between these two terms in order to think about Samson's anxiety and his acts of terror as a linked pair, I had better explain why. As Sianne Ngai has usefully sketched in the introduction to her chapter on anxiety in *Ugly Feelings*, anxiety is both omnipresent and under-theorized, particularly in psychoanalysis, where, in an account less than fully cashed out by Freud, it is suggestively if fleetingly described as the projected displacement onto others of a trait disavowed yet discovered in the self.[38] Described by Ernst Bloch as an "expectant emotion" that "opens out entirely [into the] horizon of time," anxiety manifests its distorting effects in the present on behalf of a dreadful, imminent futurity, a potentiality held always in reserve.[39] By contrast, to rise from "mere" anxiety to the exalted and

heightened affective state of genuine "terror" would seem to require some kind of direct encounter with the threatening presence/existence of the object-cause of fear; terror, to be legitimate, needs some kind of proof or objective ratification, and here Ngai's attention to the "ignoble" strains of affect usefully flags the problematic comparative "weakness" of anxiety in comparison with its grandiose neighbor, terror.[40] Insofar as terror is terror "at" something and anxiety is a projection "from" the self, the two would seem to just miss each other, falling on either side of some hoary boundaries that we theorists are said to do without: public/private, self/other.

But the overlapping yet distinct states of terror and anxiety can feed and sustain each other: Within the rhetorical self-understanding of the ongoing "war on terror" that characterizes both government policy and public discourse in the United States, the wrenching, confirming experience of terrorist violence "proves" that our sources of terror have an external cause in this world whose potential future resurgence verifies and legitimates an ongoing, endless vigilance whose signature affect is a slow burn of omnipresent anxiety. Anxiety stands in for but also draws its support from the enabling fact of "terror," closing a feedback loop anchored at both ends of a temporal horizon: the terror of "then" sanctions the anxiety of "now" on behalf of an endlessly expected return of a terror "to come."

Working through the intersection of these terms, I think we can overlay the temporal/social structure of displacement at the core of theories of anxiety onto the dramatic structure of *Samson Agonistes*, allowing us to think about Samson's final act of destructive religious violence (an act of "terror") as a violent ratification and expulsive expression of an ongoing emotional state (his nonstop "act" – in the sense of public affective display – of anxiety). Releasing anxiety into terror, the destruction of the feast of Dagon is the triumphant terrorist catastrophe that retroactively justifies and releases the affect stored/savored/suffered as anxiety across Milton's notoriously static, staunchly talky exercise in Senecan closet-drama. Framed thusly, that very dramatic structure's problematic resemblance to narrative arcs at work in the ongoing "war on Terror," a context through which Milton's text is increasingly read, redoubles this problem of anxiety as the refusal of a resemblance (or, really, the terrifying grip of the fearful recognition of a resemblance). In particular, I think we can read recent expenditures of critical energy dedicating to preventing terrorist meaning from attaching to Milton as themselves an ongoing work of anxious displacement.

This is particularly the case with the pressure that the Carey/Fish debate continues to exert upon the scene of Milton interpretation. Acknowledgement of the "debate" is mandatory, if the introductory comments included in recent critical editions of Milton are taken as evidence. Stoking the flames in a contest of ever more indignant and anxious defenses of Milton/Fish (it is occasionally hard to tell the difference in the more partisan accounts) from these charges, the recent anthology *Milton in the Age of Fish: Essays on Authorship, Text, and Terrorism* collects together a range of responses to the controversy, including, naturally, a quintessentially barbed and bemused contribution from Fish himself.

To reduce things down to proper size, the dispute hinges upon debates about the fitness of Carey's account of Fish's account of Milton's account of

Samson's understanding of a divine message from God that sanctions the violent destruction of the feast of Dagon. In a usefully skeptical assessment of the entire exchange, Feisal G. Mohammed notes the subterranean consensus that organizes this mutually convenient display of polemical pyrotechnics on both the (lonely) Carey side and in the (overpopulated) Fish camp. Each side works to protect Milton from openly advocating a "terrorist" meaning. Having parsed Fish's reading as one which leads us to the uncomfortable conclusion that Milton gives us no way to discredit the "great act" that Samson commits, Carey's most inflammatory statements are interrogatives: if this is what *Samson Agonistes* itself advocates, "should [the work] not be withdrawn from schools and colleges and, indeed, banned more generally as an incitement to terrorism?"[41] These calls are designed to prompt a solidly humanist "surely not" from the *TLS* congregation, and manifest Carey's faith that Milton must be critiquing religious violence and urging us to read Samson's "rousing inward motions" that prompt his destruction of the temple of Dagon critically and ironically.[42]

Demurring from common ground, the Fish contingent respond that the problem of how to evaluate Samson's violence is the point of the poem, alleging that we cannot know whether or not Milton condemns Samson because we cannot know whether the "rousing inward motions" that Samson feels do indeed come from God or not.[43] The dispute stalls at the limits of what we can know about "the interior recesses of the willing and intending heart."[44] There is, I think, a curious queer echo here. Try reading the following account of Samson's motivations with a queer inflection: "Only the intention, the unbidden and constitutive inward orientation, makes the difference, and the difference can only be recognized by one who is its (internal) bearer. *It takes one to know one.*"[45] Fish is talking about how to tell a terrorist from a religiously inspired hero, but his language of "willing hearts" and "unbidden orientations" suggests an altogether queerer register of intersubjective speculation. Reading the anxiety generated by the threat of effeminacy "within" (in every sense) Samson alongside the critical anxiety generated by the threat of terrorist meaning within Milton's text, a shared logic of displacement produces a formal structure in which an inaccessible abyss of interiority is posited as a bar to knowing/seeing. Effeminacy on the plane of gender and terrorism on the plane of religious politics occupy a shared structural position as the excluded-yet-ineradicable perverse possibility that mobilizes and justifies a violent and repressive response within the text and in the persistent patterns of critical denial outside and about it.[46]

I hope I have not been struggling by oblique or critically paranoid means to say that there is some proto-, crypto-, demi-, quasi-, or pseudo-homosexual subject buried "within" the encrypted inwardness of Samson's "rousing inward motions," nor am I suggesting that his repeated bewailing of his effeminacy constitutes some repudiation of an "inner" homosexual subjectivity.[47] Patently, Samson's anxiety about his effeminacy is not hidden, repressed or concealed; it's there on the page before us, and present in his mouth as he bewails its "foul embrace" to anyone who will listen. What is displaced, disavowed, or refused by Samson is a feeling of proximity or resemblance between himself and the creaturely hybridity of Dagon, a feeling that collects as anxiety and explodes into

terror. With this dynamic in mind, let us now return to Lupton's formulation with which I began: "Milton's Samson is finally not typological (a figure of Christ), or even typological in a terminally suspended way ("exil'd from light"), but *anti-typological*, arresting the recuperative moment of typology in the sheer violence of his act."[48] The title of Lupton's essay, "Samson Dagonistes," elegantly weds two elements that I have joined together, with far less elegance, as a "queer assemblage," and I owe much of my own understanding of how to think about the politics and poetics of Milton's writing to her example. But here I want to suggest that the violent resistance to the hold or claim of typology within Samson that Lupton detects might be directed not forward to Christian appropriations and equivalences but "backwards," to the forces of chthonic and pagan idolatry that press up against his blind, subjected, "effeminated" Nazarite body. The resemblance being violently rejected is not a resemblance between Samson and Christ but rather the resemblance between Samson and Dagon, the typological equivalence that Lupton's very title proposes, in which the sidelong axis of comparison and competition (which will later produce the decisive conflict between God and Dagon in 1 Samuel) screens out the backwards/inwards pressure of effeminacy within and the terrifying, terror-producing pressures of racial/sexual/ethnic/species-based otherness without.

Chimerical Conclusion

The notion of an "assemblage" need not, in and of itself, arrive fraught with terrifying implications: if Dagon is an inter-species assemblage, so is a chicken and bacon sandwich. Yet the chimerical hybrid body remains threatening, and threateningly present all the same, and not only in the terrorist register that Jasbir Puar has theorized; as hasty legislation and corporate bioethical policy boards struggle to catch up with the accelerating pace of genetic engineering, our own historical moment is one of the nonstop proliferation of biological chimeras, hybrids, mashups, "queer assemblages" across national borders and species barriers.[49] In a passage from "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" that has become something of a touchstone for queer theory, Michel Foucault wrote that: "History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being–as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself."[50] Surveying the ruined panorama of the present, it is not hard to find discontinuities in our being, divided emotions, instinctual dramas, multiplied bodies, and states divided against themselves. Indeed, it's hard *not* to find them. One might point to the way that Craigslist murders compete with transatlantic bombers, embryonic rabbit-human fusions, pigs whose hearts beat with human blood, and instantly uplinked cell phone footage of bombed funerals, bombed weddings, executed tyrants and decapitated journalists for the morcellated remains of our attention – were it not for the sad certainty that nothing dates faster than the contemporary indexes of our own supposedly irreversible freefall into fragmentation. If (and this is a genuine if) the trans-

historical acts of recognition that queer studies have up to now provided have helped us to understand the desires, pleasures, and terrors of bodies past, there is no standing guarantee that these logics – of assemblage, of anxiety – will continue to address the divided and discontinuous bodies of today. Foucault told us that "the genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin."[51] What resources do we need in order to converse with the chimeras of the present?

Notes

1. John Carey, "A Work in Praise of Terrorism? September 11 and *Samson Agonistes*," *Times Literary Supplement*. September 6, 2002. 15-16.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Milton's poetry are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007). All prose works are quoted from the relevant volume of *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, eds. Robert Ayers and Austin Woolrych (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82).

3. Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Samson Dagonistes," in *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 181-205, 202.

4. As Amanda Bailey has noted, "The word 'masculinity', which did not enter the English language until the middle of the eighteenth century, referred to the privilege awarded to men in matters of inheritance. 'Manhood' and 'manliness' were the terms used in the sixteenth century to connote those qualities essential to civility, which was identified teleologically as the definitive characteristic of the adult man." Amanda Bailey, *Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 48.

5. The "yoke" invoked in the phrase "the yoke of foul effeminacy" is itself a kind of rhetorical switchpoint. Here it figures not simply the subjection of man to woman, hence a reversal of the expected hierarchical power relations within marriage, but also the yoking of manhood to effeminacy. This "misyoking marriage" is a grotesque inversion of the positive ways in which marital submission is depicted as a just expression of manly self-discipline in the divorce tracts, as when Milton alleges that if Parliament wisely permits divorce to justly dissatisfied husbands, then "the yoke of prudent and manly discipline will be generally submitted to." Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, 863.

6. OED, italics mine.

7. David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 33.

8. I do not mean to suggest that this reading of the "One-Sex Model" hegemonically determines the current state of early modern scholarship about gender. The overly rigid application of this model has been challenged on both dramatic grounds and on medico-historical grounds from several directions; see Janet Adelman's essay "Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model," in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, eds. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 23-52, for an alternative to the Laqueur/Greenblatt formulation.

9. These terms were first used in a series of articles for *Social Text*, and are now collected together, sometimes in revised forms, in Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). All Puar quotes are from that text unless otherwise indicated. As a critical and philosophical term of art, "assemblage" is the joint coinage of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and denotes a formation of sub-components with expressive consistency but no essence. As such, assemblages range up and down the scale of ontological organization, from molecules to symptoms to cities. Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Press, 1987). See also Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2006).

10. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 54.

11. Jasbir Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages," *Social Text* 23.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2005): 121-39, 133.

12. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 10.

13. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 10.

14. As Julia Lupton puts it in her essay "Samson Dagonistes," "Samson's final act [. . .] mounts an assault on the very possibility of a public sphere (free assembly and congregation being the true target of terrorism)" (197).

15. A historical claim about a change in the discursive codes and logics of sexual *prohibition* was recast into a nominalist claim about persons and experience, and the result was the act/identity debate of the 1990s. For a refutation of the widespread misreading of Foucault, see David Halperin's chapter "Forgetting Foucault" in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 24-47. Kenneth Borris' *Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance: A Sourcebook of Sixteenth to Mid-Seventeenth Century Texts, 1460-1650* (New York: Routledge, 2004) re-opened the moribund act/identity debate, archivally challenging the de facto persistence of the "acts paradigm" by restoring to view a culturally available early modern notion of same-sex-desiring subjects. Carla Freccero's *Queer / Early / Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) complicates – but does not counter – Borris' work of historical reclamation with a theoretical project designed to frame "queerness" as a ghostly agent that dissolves temporality itself, queering the very act of trans-historical interpretation, and raising the stakes of what we as critics take ourselves to be doing when we "queer the Renaissance."

16. The key works on this topic that still largely dominate the discussion are James Grantham Turner's *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Joseph Wittreich's *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). For a more recent scholarly collection of work on the topic, see Catherine Gimelli Martin, ed., *Milton and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

17. Ross Leasure, "Milton's Queer Choice: Comus at Castlehaven," *Milton Quarterly* 36 (2002): 63-86, 78. Reticence is a kind way to put it. The largely inhospitable climate of Milton studies to such considerations might be conveyed in a telling if perhaps unfair quotation from an essay by Diane Kelsey McColley entitled "Milton and the Sexes" that graces *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): "Curiously, some people object to Eve's derivation from Adam, in spite of her original splendour in truth, beauty, wisdom and sanctitude, who are unalarmed by the news that we are all derived from hairy bipeds called *Australopithecus afarensis*. Some resent her service to 'God in him' who recommend the narrower confines of 'self-servience' and have no interest in service of God at all. Some censure the slight imparity of perfections of Eve and Adam without lamenting our general inferiority to them both. Some think Eve unfree who do not protest the massive oppression of psychological theories that put each person and all action and affection into a few sexual categories and locate the genesis of all creativity in the vicinity of that portion of the male body on which 'Adam sat'" (163). And so on. There is indeed much that is "curious" about this situation, from McColley's evocation of the evolution- endorsing, Freud-besotted, godless horde to the torturous discretion she marshals when prodded to indicate the precise vicinity of the anus. Granting that McColley's rhetorical intention is to estrange beliefs she assumes are normative in her readership in order hopefully to warm them to the possibility that Milton's religious convictions are no more ridiculous than their evolutionary or psychoanalytic explanatory frameworks, such jeremiads have the de facto effect of evangelizing for the beauty and integrity of those convictions instead of critically unpacking them. Perhaps such defensive displays derive from the sense that, in the wake of T. S. Eliot's right hook and "second wave" feminism's left hook, Milton still needs to be protected from philistine readers (or worse, Milton's readership needs to be whittled back down to a "fit audience, though few"). If this is the predominant tone in Milton studies when it considers some rather old critical frameworks for thinking about sex, sexuality, and gender, then the reluctance of recent queer scholars to even bother entering the fray is hardly surprising. Happily, "Milton studies" accommodates multiple perspectives, as contributions from Gordon Teskey, Julia

Lupton, Ross Leasure, Marshall Grossman, Victoria Kahn and Derek Wood (among many others one might include) amply demonstrate.

18. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 2007), 51.

19. Gregory Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 226. From an unlikely quarter, one can see support for Bredbeck's assertion in Stanley Fish's local recognition of the reversal of gender roles at work in the dialogue between Comus and the Lady. (Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001], 172). For a full-dress analysis of the gendered implications of Miltonic identification with the Lady, see William Shullenberger's "Milton's Lady and Lady Milton: Chastity, Prophecy and Gender in A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle," in *Fault Lines and Controversies in the Study of Seventeenth- Century English Literature*, ed. Claude Summers (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 204-26.

20. C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 113.

21. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation*, 226.

22. Michel Foucault, "Nietzche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 153.

23. From any perspective, Lewis's *Preface* seems an odd choice as an exemplar of relentlessly straight critical performativity; space prevents a full exegesis, but one might at least arch an eyebrow in passing at the passionate conclusion of Lewis' dedication of his text to the Milton scholar Charles Williams: "Apparently the door of the prison was really unlocked all the time; but it was only you who thought of trying the handle. *Now we can all come out*." (vi, italics mine). Such overspills of homosocial scholarly affect abound in the archive of the old scholarship against which "out" queer work defines itself, and "trans-sexuality" clearly mattered enough to Lewis for him to import the concept directly into the homosocial milieu of the scholarly male friendship networks he fictionalized in his adult science fiction novel *Perelandra*, where the philologist hero Ransom returns from his expedition to Venus muttering about the "trans-sexuality" of the "eldila," an angelic race of super-beings. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribner, 1944), 30.

24. Marshall Grossman, "The Onomastic Destiny of Stanley Fish," in Michael Lieb and Albert Labriola, eds., *Milton in the Age of Fish: Essays on Authorship, Text, and Terrorism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 18. Film savvy readers will of course have noted that the chant "one of us, one of us" derives from Todd Browning's 1932 film "Freaks," which, as Grossman notes, concludes with a monstrous transformation of its anti-heroine Cleopatra from a "normal" trapeze artist into a "half woman, half chicken [. . .] put on display in a sideshow" (51). It is entirely in keeping with the Milton's hybrid morphology of difference that a contemporary critic's figure for a Milton who resembles "us" here produces the comic/horrific construction of a monstrous hybrid, built not out of different species but out of anachronistically incommensurable "values."

25. Milton, *The Complete Prose Works*, 1061.

26. For more on the rhetoric of effeminacy and gender in the political tracts and pamphlets, see Gina Hausknecht's essay "The Gender of Civic Virtue," in *Milton and Gender*, ed. Martin, 19-33.

27. Milton, *The Complete Prose Works*, 1077.

28. Milton, *The Complete Prose Works*, 1085.

29. Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 73, italics mine.

30. Paré, 68-71.

31. Milton, *The Complete Prose Works*, 1085.

32. At once pictorial and theatrical, the *Cry* is a monstrous hybrid of persons, genders, species, "colors," and materials. The association of the royalist cause with a maudlin, overwrought and hence risible form of theatricality, implicit in his mockery of "the Tragedy of a Cry," follows from Milton's dismissal of William Marshall's notorious depiction of Charles I that graced *Eikon Basilike*; Milton described it as "the conceited portraiture before his book, *drawn out to the full measure of a masking scene*" (1062, italics mine) Victoria Kahn has noted Milton's response to Marshall's drawing and to the royalist propaganda that surrounded as a critical refusal of the psychology of

pity in favor of "the unsentimental application of justice," but Kahn is less concerned with the explicit gendering of sentimentality. See Victoria Kahn, "Aesthetics as Critique: Tragedy and *Trauerspiel* in *Samson Agonistes*." *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman (New York: Routledge, 2007), 104-29, 105.

33. Ben Jonson, "Horace, of the Art of Poetry," *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt, (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 354-371, 354.

34. Sir Philip Sidney, "A Defence of Poetry" (1595), in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 336-392, 343.

35. See Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, 310. For an account of the confusion generated by this name, see Joseph Fontenrose. "Dagon and El" *Oriens* 10.2 (1957): 277-79.

36. Milton loves this trick, which has its debut in an account of another group of animal/human hybrids, the "monsters" engendered by the enchanted liquid in Circe's magic cup: "Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape / And downward fell into a groveling swine." (Milton, "A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634" [Comus], lines 52- 53). Unlike his Homeric source, in Milton's version of Comus' acts of transmogrification, only the head of the enchanted person is transformed, thus producing another cross-species assemblage. As described in his stage directions, Comus enters "*with his rout of monsters headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women*." (Milton, "A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634," 67).

37. Lupton, "Samson Dagonistes," 199.

38. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 203. Lacan admits as much in his introductory remarks to his seminar on anxiety of 1962-63: "There is no subject where the net of the Freudian discourse is closer, in short, to giving us a false sense of security; because precisely, when we go into this text [Freud's 'Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety'] you will see what is to be seen in connection with anxiety, that there is no net, because precisely as regards anxiety, each mesh, as I might appropriately put it, has no meaning except by leaving the void in which anxiety is. In the discourse, thank God, of 'Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety,' *everything is spoken about except anxiety*. (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Anxiety 1962 - 1963, Book X*, trans. Cormac Gallgher [Eastbourne, Antony Rowe, 1995], 6, italics mine.) Lacan explicitly defines anxiety as an affect (rather than an emotion) which is not, itself, subject to repression: "One finds it displaced, mad, inverted, metabolized, but it is not repressed. What is repressed are the signifiers which moor it" (11). Surveying the concept's formulations in Freud and deciding that they do not add up to a unitary theory of anxiety, in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* Laplanche and Pontalis split the difference with two separate entries on "Anxiety Neurosis" and "Anxiety Hysteria" (J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith [New York: W. W. Norton, 1973], 37-40). The most extended account of anxiety seems to occur in the analysis of the phobia of Little Hans.

39. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 210.

40. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 7.

41. Carey, "A Work in Praise of Terrorism?," 16.

42. As Kerrigan, Rumrich, Fallon and others have noted, the argument that we are meant to critique rather than celebrate Samson's "great act" was first made in 1986 by Joseph Wittreich in *Interpreting Samson Agonistes* (Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, 703). Carey added polemical urgency to a critical position that does not, in and of itself, stand or fall based on his additional claims about the resemblance between the biblical source and contemporary politics. Debates about whether or not such a historical effect of resemblance produces a transformation of the meaning of a literary work can neither support nor undermine the specific argument about Milton's representation of Samson. The heat of the rhetorical moment in which Carey's essay appeared seems to have produced as an unfortunate side effect the impression that the success or failure of this reading could somehow index, and prove or disprove, a larger claim about the historical nature of an artwork's meaning.

43. Even Julia Lupton, in the context of an entirely separate set of theoretical commitments and concerns, seems to arrive at a distinctly Fish-ian suspension on this topic, when she writes at the end of her discussion of Samson's violence as an example of the Benjaminian category of "divine violence," that "Milton neither glorifies nor condemns such violence, but rather explores its conditions and calls us to judge it." ("Samson Dagonistes," 184). By stopping

short of a decision and leaving her readers precariously exposed to these contradictory outcomes, Lupton's very avoidance of the obvious options (glorify? condemn?) constitutes itself a kind of choice, and one that places her alongside the Fish position, albeit on her own terms.

44. Fish, *How Milton Works*, 252.

45. Fish, *How Milton Works*, 252, italics mine.

46. Participants in the *Samson Agonistes* "debate" (if that is what it is/was) are not arguing coherently from shared terms, but collaboratively dismantling the platform upon which such a debate might take place by insisting upon mutually incongruous semantic constructions of "terrorism," with Carey's decision to elastically apply a modern political term to a Renaissance poem from a Biblical source cue-ing a nominalist restriction of the phrase on the part of Fish. Thus, at a certain level the debate about whether or not one can talk intelligibly about early modern terrorists replicates the debate about whether or not one can talk intelligibly about early modern homosexuals. The historically correct cop-out simply avoids unpleasantness by circumscribing the conceptual availability of a threatening and "modern" phenomenon to Renaissance subjects and the problem is solved.

To ask the vulgar question: Would John Milton have thought of himself as endorsing something that he would have understood as equivalent to "terrorism" as this term is used today? Obviously, to ask the question at all is already to assume that terrorism is a unity about which a "we" has coalesced in a shared sense of what does and does not count as an act of terrorism, and consigns offstage the attendant debates about the difference between political liberation movements and terrorism and where to place acts of sabotage intended to disrupt the domination of a foreign power along the continuum of strategic acceptability. Would John Milton have approved of violent acts if they were committed on behalf of a religious position with which he sided? If we are to draw upon *Christian Doctrine* for evidence, the immediate answer is an obvious and resounding negative. People should be free to write about the Bible and express varying opinions upon it, and "Without this freedom to which I refer, there is no religion and no gospel. Violence alone prevails; and *it is disgraceful and disgusting that the Christian religion should be supported by violence*" (1143, italics mine). Yet if we rephrase the question in another way, a different response is generated. If God tells us to do something, ought we to do it? The answer to this sort of question, as Fish has delighted in reminding inattentive readers of Milton, is resoundingly yes.

47. For a reading of the place of melancholy in this interior/exterior architecture which both draws upon but diverges from these remarks, see Drew Daniel "My Self, My Selpucher: Assembling Melancholy Masculinity in *Samson Agonistes,*" *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 251-290.

48. Lupton, "Samson Agonistes," 202.

49. As one example among many, consider a *Washington Post* article that followed closely upon the announcement in 2003 from Shanghai Secondary Medical University that hybrid human/animal embryos had been bred and allowed to live for several days while stem cell tissue was being harvested: "In Minnesota, pigs are being born with human blood in their veins. In Nevada, there are sheep whose livers and hearts are largely human. In California, mice peer from their cages with human brain cells firing in their skulls. [. . .] Biologists call these hybrid animals chimeras, after the mythical Greek creature with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpent's tail." Rick Weiss, "Of Mice, Men and In-Between: Scientists Debate Blending of Human, Animal Forms," *Washington Post*. November 20, 2004.

50. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 154.

51. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 144.